DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 420 EA 026 029

AUTHOR Ceperley, Patricia; Simon, Karen
TITLE Are Our Schools Safe? AEL Policy Briefs.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, W. Va.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 94
CONTRACT RP91002002
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Crime; Discipline Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Prevention; *School Safety; *School Security; *State Action; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky; *Tennessee; *Virginia; *West Virginia

ABSTRACT

Because of continued concern about school violence, this policy brief examines the trends in school violence in the context of social violence, describes efforts to make schools safe, and reports efforts to curb violence in the four-state Appalachian region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). Perceptions of the extent of school violence differ. Principals tend to view it as increasing, and students and teachers in general report that they feel safe in their schools. Schools can expect to play a role in helping to reduce or prevent violence; however, they need the help of parents, community agencies, and state policymakers. Sidebars present the recommendations of the American Psychological Association (APA) Commission on Violence and Youth and of Virginia's Education Summit. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Policy Briefs

AEL

A publication of the
APPALACHIA EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY
STATE POLICY PROGRAM ◆ 1994

ED 373 420

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ARE OUR SCHOOLS SAFE?

Stories about violence in our schools are appearing regularly in various news media. Parents, educators, and even students wonder if schools are safe places for children to learn and for adults to work. Because of continued concern about school violence, this policy brief examines the trends in school violence in the context of social violence, describes efforts to make schools safe, and reports efforts to curb violence in the four-state Region.

Americans not only desire but expect schools to be places where people are safe from harm. The nation's president and governors agreed and, in 1989, set a goal to make all schools safe, disciplined, and drug free by the year 2000. Since then, concerns about violence in schools have increased. In a 1993 national poll, the public ranked drug abuse, discipline, and fighting or violence as second, third, and fourth among the 10 biggest problems facing schools. Only school funding concerns ranked higher.[1]

THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY

Violence is not only an issue in schools. In 1992, more than 111,000 violent incidents—including 750 deaths—occurred in work environments.[2] Each year, one in four American households is affected by violent crime or theft. One-half of all Americans say they are afraid to walk down streets in their own neighborhoods at night, and one-fourth fear for their lives in their own homes. Homicide is second only to accidental injury as a cause of death for young Americans.[3] Most alarming is the meteoric rise (53 percent from 1968 to 1988) in all violent crime—murder, rape, robbery, and assault—committed by youths, male and female, 17 and younger.[4] Such data led Secretary of Health and Human Resources Donna Shalala to conclude:

> There's violence throughout society...[eliminating] violence can't be viewed simply as trying to make schools safe...we have to try and make the streets safe as well.[5]

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) Commission on Violence and Youth, certain social experiences—accessibility of weapons, the availability and use of illegal drugs, violence in the media, and involvement with antisocial groups—increase the likelihood that children and youth will be involved with violence. But these experiences do not inevitably lead to violence. Children and youth are strongly influenced by what they have previously learned about violence and aggression at home and at school.[6]

THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Most agree that social violence is spilling over into the nation's schools, but few agree on just how big the problem is.

Urban, suburban, and rural school principals perceive that violence has increased in their schools in the past five years.[7] Studies show that more than 16,000 crimes occur per school day,[8] and an estimated 270,000 undetected guns go to school every day.[9] A 1993 Harris survey found that 22 percent of the students who responded said they carried a weapon to school during the 1992-93 school year; four percent carried a handgun. Only seven percent said their schools used metal detectors to search for weapons. However, 55 percent believed that metal detectors should be used.[10]

Such reports raise public concerns, yet Metropolitan Life's survey of teachers and students found that 77 percent of the teachers and 50 percent of the students felt "very safe" in or near their schools.[11] And, in spite of media reports, neither students nor teachers believed violence was on the rise in their schools. MetLife concludes that school violence appears to be localized. Teachers feel less safe in urban schools, where student achievement is low or where minorities make up most of the student body, and low-achieving students feel less safe than students with good grades.

For some, school is a safe haven. Studies show that crime-ridden schools tend to exist in crime-ridden neighborhoods, but school environments are much safer than the neigh-

EA 026 029

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

borhoods in which they are located.[12] Further, students rate some places in their neighborhood—subways, parks, and streets—as more dangerous than their school.[13]

◆

Reducing and Preventing Violence

Schools, communities, and families can play an important role in curbing violence. The APA Commission on Violence and Youth, following a two-year study, recommended specific violence-reduction strategies (see box below). Many schools are initiating one or more of these. To keep weapons out, schools are increasing surveillance and supervision around the school, installing metal detectors, establishing hotlines so that students can anonymously report those who have brought weapons to school, and keeping unauthorized persons off campus.

Schools are also moving forward with conflict-resolution programs for students and adults. Typical strategies include training students to mediate disputes among their peers, teaching conflict resolution as part of the curriculum, or training staff in conflict resolution strategies. The most successful programs involve both students and educators.[15]

Because reducing violence often requires expertise beyond that of educators, schools are reaching out to professionals such as law enforcement and social service agencies. Finally, schools are inviting parents and the community to reinforce lessons children learn at school and help the school transmit the values of parents and society.[16]

State-level policymakers are also taking steps to curb violence among youth. At least 18 states have enacted laws prohibiting gun possession by juveniles. Colorado created a separate penal system for juvenile weapon offenders and ordered the records of those juveniles to be made public. California and Virginia require records of violent students to be sent to new schools and shared with the teachers. Massachusetts' laws permit principals to suspend students charged with a felony and expel convicted felons from school.[17] Connecticut's chief state attorney assigned two special prosecutors to cope with a surge of violence in Hartford-area schools.[18] In 1993, the Virginia legislature enacted 13 laws aimed at improving school safety.

At the federal level, Education Secretary Richard Riley proposed legislation that would provide additional support for schools and communities working to combat youth violence. According to Riley, two thirds of the funds in the Safe Schools Act of 1993 are for "prevention, such as conflict resolution and peer mediation."[19] Remaining funds will go to schools to beef up security. In addition, the President's 1995 budget proposal boosts programs to ensure safe and drug-free schools by 40 percent—to $600 million—another indication of the size of the problem.

◆

Around the AEL Region

AEL's four-state Region has not escaped violence in its schools. And the Region's education policymakers and practitioners are taking measures to keep their schools safe.

Kentucky

A number of Kentucky groups are addressing school violence. The Kentucky School Boards Association convened a task force of state-level policymakers to study the problem of school violence in the state and prepare recommendations for the 1994 legislative session. The state attorney general, who has taken a keen interest in the issue, solicited support for his legislative agenda to keep weapons out of schools. The Kentucky board of education supports that effort. The senate education committee convened a panel of state education officials to study the issue between legislative sessions. Laws already require that teachers be notified about students who have a medical condition that threatens the health and safety of others or who have committed acts of violence against teachers. Legislation to prohibit the possession of guns on or near school property is under consideration. School administrators, who say agencies need to share information about violent students, have proposed legislative action to make that possible.

APA Commission on Violence and Youth

The commission recommends specific efforts in the following areas:

- early childhood interventions directed toward parents, childcare providers, and healthcare providers to help build the critical foundation of attitudes, knowledge, and behavior related to aggression;
- school-based interventions to help schools provide a safe environment and effective programs to prevent violence;
- heightened awareness of cultural diversity and involvement of community members in planning, implementing, and evaluating intervention efforts;
- development of the mass media's potential to be part of the solution to violence, not just a contributor to the problem;
- limiting access to firearms by children and youth and teaching them how to prevent firearm violence;
- reduction of youth involvement with alcohol and drugs, known contributing factors to violence by youth and to family violence directed at youth;
- psychological health services for young perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of violence to avert the trajectory toward later involvement in more serious violence;
- education programs to reduce prejudice and hostility—two factors that lead to hate crimes and violence against social groups; and
- efforts to strengthen the ability of police and community leaders to prevent mob violence by early and appropriate intervention.[14]

Contact: Trudy Sullivan, manager, School and Community Resources Branch, Kentucky Department of Education, Capital Plaza Tower, 500 Mero St., Frankfort, KY 40601; 502/564-3678.

Tennessee

A survey of more than 180,000 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders found that 60 percent of the respondents felt their school was safe—higher than the national average of 50 percent.[20]

Even so, concerns about safety led the state board of education to appoint a subcommittee to study school violence and propose options for the board to consider. The Tennessee Education Association also identified school violence as a concern, created a task force, and cooperated with AEL's Classroom Instruction program to study the issue. The study group examined conflict resolution and peer mediation practices, identified existing programs, and developed a resource guide to help teachers find materials and methods to reduce classroom disruption and resolve conflict.[21]

Local school officials are responding to concerns about school violence, too. Nashville schools are implementing a conflict-resolution program and plan to train all school employees. In addition, a task force of administrators, parents, and teachers is considering policies and programs to prevent violence. Memphis schools are providing a telephone hotline on which students can anonymously report others who bring weapons to school; 16 reports of weapons possession were received during the first three weeks of school.

Contact: June Rivers, executive administrative assistant to the commissioner of education, Tennessee Department of Education, Gateway Plaza, 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN; 615/741-1090.

Virginia

To determine the extent of violence in schools, the Virginia Department of Education is tracking eight types of criminal acts that occur in schools. During 1991-92, the first year of implementation, local officials reported more than 20,000 incidents. Most incidents occurred at the middle school level, the most common type of violence was student fighting, and males were involved in criminal acts three times as often as females. To improve the accuracy of future survey results, state officials plan to clarify the definitions of various criminal acts, get feedback from local officials about the format of the survey, and in- local officials about the intend- use of the data to be collected.[22]

In 1992, seven statewide education groups formed The Education Summit, a coalition that formulated recommendations to address school violence (see box above). During its 1993 session, the state legislature created a special joint subcommittee on school violence and acted upon many of the summit's recommendations, giving local school officials more authority and better access to information about offenders. Now, local school officials are

- notified when students are attending a correctional department learning center,
- permitted access to discipline records of transfer students,
- authorized to refuse admission for one year to students who have been expelled from another school for possession of weapons or drugs or for the infliction of injury to another, and
- allowed to require students who have caused injury to others to attend an alternative education program.

Contact: Marsha O. Hubbard, associate specialist, Adolescent Division, Virginia Department of Education, P. O. Box 6Q, Richmond, VA 23216; 804/371-0249.

Virginia's Education Summit Recommendations for Action

- Establish and apply disciplinary policies.
- Improve access to and use of student disciplinary records.
- Limit the availability of weapons to children and youth.
- Develop outreach programs for parents of disruptive youth;
- Require parents to meet their parental obligations.
- Provide alternative programs for students who cannot remain in traditional educational settings.
- Establish early childhood programs.
- Cooperate with others in the community.
- Create a safe physical environment.
- Train teachers in mediation, conflict resolution, and appreciation of cultural diversity.[23]

West Virginia

State education officials are taking steps to ensure that students play a key role in curbing school violence by inviting students to participate with teachers in eight regional Safe Schools Summits. The theme of the summit meetings—Students Against Violent Environments (SAVE)—was developed by students. The purpose of the summits is to involve students and teachers in developing action plans. The summits culminate a year of activities that began in January 1993, when representatives of three teacher organizations, the state superintendent of schools, and the state board of education president signed a resolution that calls for educators, law enforcement officials, government, and business leaders to keep public schools free of violence.

The state superintendent declared safe schools a priority and created a task force of education and government leaders to consid-

er the problem of school violence. Legislation now requires students who have been suspended or expelled from a public or private school to seek the approval of the county superintendent, after consulting with the school principal. School administrators have taken steps to keep weapons out of their schools. Because book bags and coats make good hiding places for guns, some schools forbid students to take them to class. Students who bring guns to school are suspended and police are called to investigate.

Contact: Therese Wilson, director, Student Services and Assessment, West Virginia Department of Education, Building 6, Room B-057, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. E., Charleston, WV 25305-0330; 304/558-2546.

❖

Summary

Perceptions of the problem of school violence differ, but most agree that schools can expect to play a role in helping reduce or prevent violence. Surveillance and supervision may have to be increased. Students, teachers, and other school staff may have to learn new skills, such as peer mediation or conflict resolution. Parents and community agencies will have to assist. State policymakers can support the school-level efforts by enacting policies that give administrators access to information about violent student behavior. They can make training available for teachers and administrators, and provide materials and other educational resources to schools. Finally, school officials may want to begin tracking the types and number of incidents. This way, they will know if their efforts to curb school violence have been successful.

❖

Notes

[1] S. M. Elam et al. "The 25th Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 75, No. 2, October 1993, pp. 137-152.

[2] "Violence on the job led to 750 deaths last year," *Detroit Free Press*, September 5, 1993.

[3] K. A. Dodge, "Youth Violence: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?" *Tennessee Teacher*, October 1992, p. 9.

[4] T. Lickona, "The Case For Values Education," *Virginia Journal of Education*, May 1993, pp. 6-14.

[5] "Solution to School Violence Is the Community, Satellite Town Meeting Experts Advise," *Community Update*, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, August 1993, p. 2.

[6] APA Commission on Violence and Youth, *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*, American Psychological Association, New York, 1993, Vol. I, p. 6.

[7] T. Toch and T. Gest, "Violence in schools," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 8, 1993, p. 32.

[8] Congressman Jose Serrano (D-NY), Congressional Record, January 21, 1993.

[9] Toch and Gest, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

[10] "Guns among young people in the United States." *Youth Record*. Youth Policy Institute, Washington, DC, August 5, 1993.

[11] *Survey of the American Teacher 1993: Violence in America's Public Schools*, MetLife Teachers' Survey, New York.

[12] J. Menacker et al., "Community Influences on School Crime and Violence, *Urban Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1990, pp. 68-80.

[13] J. McDermott, "Crime in the School and in the Community: Offenders, Victims, and Fearful Youths," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1983, pp. 270-282.

[14] APA, *Violence and Youth*, p. 7.

[15] "Schools Test New Ways to Resolve Conflict." *Update*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA, December 1993, Vol. 35, No. 10, p. 1.

[16] S. Kadel and J. Follman, *Reducing School Violence*, SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, Greensboro, NC, March 1993.

[17] "Massachusetts Law Lets Schools Expel Felons," *Education Week*, January 12, 1994, p. 16, col. 3.

[18] Toch and Gest, op. cit., p. 34.

[19] "Solution to School Violence...," *Community Update* (a publication of the U.S. Department of Education) August 1993, p. 3.

[20] *Survey of the American Teacher 1993*, op. cit.

[21] TEA and AEL, *Reducing School Violence: Schools Teaching Peace*, July 1993.

[22] Virginia Department of Education, *Report of Acts of Violence and Substance Abuse*, Richmond, VA, 1992.

[23] The Education Summit. *Violence in Schools*. October 1992, Charlottesville, VA: Virginia Association of School Superintendents

❖

This *Policy Brief* was researched and written by Patricia Ceperley and Karen Simon, AEL staff.

This publication may be reproduced and copies distributed by others. On request, AEL will provide a master copy on white paper.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV
25325-1348

Telephone:
304/347-0400
800/624-9120
304/347-0487 (FAX)

Policy Briefs is produced by AEL's State Policy program, which provides information and services to state-level education policymakers in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Information about AEL projects, programs, and services is available by writing or calling AEL.

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RP91002002. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

AEL is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer